

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2021 – 2025



**MITCHELL
SHIRE COUNCIL**



Acknowledgement of Country

Mitchell Shire Council acknowledges the Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Mitchell Shire. We pay our respects to their rich cultures and to Elders, past, present and emerging, as well as other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live, work and play in the area.



Accessibility

In line with the Victorian Government Accessibility Guidelines, Mitchell Shire Council has formatted this document to increase its readability and accessibility to the wider community.

It has been written in plain English, as concisely as possible, and avoids the use of acronyms (initialisms) wherever possible.



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WELCOME MESSAGE



Welcome to Mitchell Shire Council's Domestic Animal Management Plan for 2021-2025.

Mitchell Shire has been recognised as one of the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria.

Council is going through a period of rapid growth, change and transition. The townships of Wallan and Beveridge are considered part of the Urban Growth Boundary while townships such as Kilmore, Broadford and Seymour are seeing increases in new residential estates. By 2041 the population of Mitchell Shire will be 170,830 which is an increase of 250% on its current population of 48,969 (Forecast id.)

As the Shire's population grows, so does the number of pets who call Mitchell Shire home.

Pet ownership can provide a host of benefits – from improving mental health and physical wellbeing, to bringing people together and providing a sense of community through shared interests.

However, Council needs to balance the needs of pet owners and non-pet owners to ensure that pet ownership within Mitchell Shire does not have significant negative impacts for the wider community or for the environment.

Every four years, Mitchell Shire Council aims to further improve their management of dogs and cats by consulting with those directly involved in animal management and seeking feedback from pet owners, relevant stakeholders, and the wider Mitchell Shire community about their experiences, concerns or suggestions.

From this consultation process, a new four-year Domestic Animal Management Plan has been developed to address emerging trends and key issues affecting pet ownership in Mitchell Shire and to meet Council's requirements under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*.

Promoting responsible pet ownership and high standards of animal welfare across the municipality is something that Mitchell Shire Council cares deeply about, this plan aims to build on the services already offered and defines areas for potential improvement or focus in the coming four years.

The goal of this Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-2025 is to provide a clear outline of how we plan to manage dogs and cats, meet our legislation requirements and continue to educate pet owners of their responsibilities for the benefit of all the people and pets who call Mitchell Shire their home.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rhonda Sanderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cr Rhonda Sanderson
Mayor, 2020-2021

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT



ABOUT THIS PLAN

What is a Domestic Animal Management Plan? Why do we need one?

The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* provides the foundation for Mitchell Shire's domestic animal management service. The plan relates directly to the management of dogs and cats. It does not relate to the management of horses, livestock, other animals kept as pets, pest animals, or wildlife. Its purpose is to encourage responsible pet ownership, protect the welfare of pets, and ensure that they do not become a nuisance or have negative impacts on the environment.

Every four years, Victorian Councils are required by the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* to prepare and implement a Domestic Animal Management Plan. This plan guides Mitchell Shire Council's service delivery to the community in relation to domestic animals.

Under the requirements of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* the Domestic Animal Management Plan must provide detail as to how Mitchell Shire Council will:

- > ensure that people comply with all the legislation that applies to the keeping of dogs and cats
- > minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals
- > address any over-population issues or high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats
- > encourage people to register and identify their dogs and cats
- > reduce the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance
- > identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in the Mitchell Shire area and ensure that those dogs are kept in accordance with the requirements of the law
- > review any Council Orders made under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, and any Local Laws that relate to dogs and cats, and determine if amendments or additions need to be made
- > review any other matters relating to the management of dogs and cats as necessary
- > determine how programs, strategies and services relating to animal management will be evaluated for success
- > ensure that animal management staff are skilled and properly trained for their role as Authorised Officers
- > review the plan's success, makes changes as required, and publish the outcomes in the Council's annual report

The content and direction of the plan is based on feedback from stakeholders, analysis of local issues and concerns, along with wider community consultation. The plan aims to set out how Council intends to meet their responsibilities under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, and how they plan to continue to improve the management of dogs and cats across the municipality over the next four years.

How does this Domestic Animal Management Plan fit in with Council’s Vision and Strategy?

Mitchell Shire Council’s *Community Vision 2050* and *Council Plan 2021-2025* set the direction and objectives for how the Mitchell Shire community want the municipality to be in the future and how Council plans to achieve this. Both focus on making the municipality prosperous and liveable, whilst protecting the natural environment that makes Mitchell Shire unique.



“We are a healthy, vibrant and connected community that values nature, diversity and innovation.”



ABOUT THIS PLAN

The Council Vision 2050 provides a long-term community vision for the municipality. It is a high-level plan that captures the long-term aspirations of the community. Broken into six key 'themes' to help collectively achieve that vision, it is driven, developed and owned by the Mitchell community with council as the facilitator in the development process.

The Vision's six themes are incorporated into all aspects of Council's planning, decision making, advocacy, and service delivery. The themes of 'Vibrant Communities', 'Shaping Neighbourhoods', and 'Nature and Parks' are particularly relevant to how we manage dogs and cats and help to inform parts of this Domestic Animal Management Plan.

Mitchell Shire Council Plan 2021-2025 focusses on the shorter to medium term aspirations, and includes strategic objectives, key strategies to achieve each goal, and outlines measures of success. It provides the strategic planning and financial budgeting that links the longer-term Vision, with Local Government service delivery, drawing together the aspirations of the community with policy and the legislative requirements and responsibilities of Local Council.

“As we grow, we will be leaders in protecting the environment and preserving the country feel and liveability of our unique communities, with visionary planning for a cohesive, prosperous, safe, and healthy future.”

The community's expectations of Council services and facilities are changing as the population grows. Residents moving into Mitchell Shire are not always aware of the negative impacts that domestic animals can have on wildlife and livestock, and pet owners living in Mitchell Shire's townships and newly developed residential areas, want to see facilities which support residents with pets, such as fenced dog parks.

Pets form an important part of vibrant communities, and the mental, social and health benefits that they bring cannot be underestimated.

Mitchell Shire Council's *Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025* defines four broad areas of priority:

- 1. Active and healthy** – including increasing participation in physical exercise and decreasing obesity rates
- 2. Informed and connected** – including social connectedness and improving mental health
- 3. Safe and respectful** – including improving safety and security in the community
- 4. Liveable and thriving** – focussing on the built and economic environments and care of the natural environment

Domestic Animal Management has a part to play in achieving these goals, with the lives of many people in the community tightly interwoven with pet ownership.



HOW WE DEVELOPED THIS PLAN

Review of the Previous Domestic Animal Management Plan

In developing this plan, the first step was to review the success of outcomes and initiatives that were included in the previous *Domestic Animal Management Plan 2017-2021*.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic did impact the delivery of some of the objectives outlined for the second half of the plan, overall, most of the objectives and criteria set for 2017-2021 were met, and the initiatives delivered.

Council ran three successful Pet Expos promoting responsible pet ownership and fostering a sense of unity in our pet-owning community. A '10-point guide' to pet ownership within Mitchell Shire was developed, aimed at new pet owners and residents.

Council introduced cheaper registration fees for animals under 12 months of age and made registering cats and dogs easier by introducing an online form. We also extended our pound hours to facilitate the return of animals to their owners and we continue to have one of the highest rehoming rates of any council in the state.

Larger scale initiatives included introducing a 'Cat Curfew' in October 2019, requiring all cats to be confined to their owner's premises between sunset and sunrise, and the development of a fenced, off-leash dog park in Kilmore.

Stakeholder and Community Survey

Central to the development of this plan is input from the community. The opinions of stakeholders, those involved directly in animal management, pet owners and the wider community help shape the direction and objectives of this plan. Each of these groups bring different perspectives, suggestions and raise different issues, all of which need to be considered carefully.

Key stakeholders were contacted by mail in early April 2021 and asked to provide feedback and suggestions. They were also invited to attend one of two Virtual Stakeholder Sessions scheduled for 4 and 11 May 2020.

A Community Survey was conducted via the Engaging Mitchell website from 6 May – 7 June 2021. The survey asked participants to comment on a variety of issues relating to dog and cat ownership within the municipality. The survey also provided opportunity for detailed comments and suggestions.

The survey was widely publicised in a variety of formats including council's website and eNewsletter, print and social media, and via community groups. This resulted in over 200 responses, with the majority of those coming from pet owners who reside within Mitchell Shire.

Although many had a particular personal experience that they wanted to share that was specific to a single location or area, there were several issues raised that were common across the municipality.

The Top 5 Issues

1. Better Access to Facilities for Dog Owners

There was a widespread call for increased facilities to assist dog owners in providing their pets with exercise.

Mitchell Shire Council already has a number of fenced 'dog parks' (located in Kilmore and within the Spring Ridge estate in Wallan), but there was almost unanimous support for increasing the number of these facilities, particularly within townships where the opportunities for off-leash exercise were limited.

2. Strong Support for Cat Curfew

The Cat Curfew introduced in October 2019 was widely supported, with many respondents indicating that had had negative experiences with cats wandering through their property or killing native wildlife. However, there was quite a bit of feedback indicating that respondents felt cat owners were not aware of the curfew and were not sure what was required.

3. Dogs wandering at large continues to be an issue

Many respondents indicated that they had had experience with dogs wandering 'at large' (without an owner present), particularly within the townships and newly developed areas of the Shire. Some reported feeling threatened by these dogs, particularly when walking their own pets on leash, and many raised the issue of hygiene with dogs soiling public places.

4. Registration and identification

Comments and suggestions relating to the registration requirements for domestic pets highlighted both strong opinions and a very mixed level of understanding of why registration occurs.

The need to keep owner details updated across all forms of identification was an ongoing issue highlighted by those involved in animal care and management. Missing or out of date contact information contributed to animals not being able to be reunited with their owners.

5. Increased opportunities for rehoming of lost, stray and surrendered animals

Although Mitchell Shire has one of the highest rehoming rates of any council in Victoria, and one of the most successful council-based Facebook groups – 'Pets of Mitchell Shire' - there is certainly strong support for increased opportunities for the rehoming of domestic pets that, for whatever reason, end up in the Mitchell Shire Pound.

HOW WE DEVELOPED THIS PLAN

Community Consultation

This Domestic Animal Management Plan is a result of both the community feedback received, monitoring of trends, and the learnings from the previous plan.

The first draft of this plan was developed following the Stakeholder and Community Survey, and after initial review by Mitchell Shire Council, it was sent out for Community Consultation to ensure that the objectives outlined within the plan for the next four years represented the community's expectations and provided a clear direction for the way pets are managed within the municipality.

The initial Stakeholder and Community Survey resulted in 220 responses from interested parties keen to make suggestions and comments relating to domestic animal management in Mitchell Shire. This was followed by another 844 responses to the Community Consultation survey once the draft document had been developed and circulated for consideration.

Although several of the objectives for the coming years are largely dictated by requirements of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (such as mandatory reporting activities and the training of animal management staff), the majority aim to address the issues raised by the wider community and stakeholders.



ABOUT MITCHELL SHIRE

Mitchell Shire, located 40 kilometres north of Melbourne, forms part of the Goulburn River Valley Region, known for its scenic beauty. The municipality stretches from the edge of the Melbourne Metropolitan area at its southern boundary to rural plains and granite plateaus surrounding the Puckapunyal Military Area to the north, covering 2862 square kilometres.

Offering a mix of urban and rural living, the municipality supports a diverse range of lifestyle and housing choices. It is also a popular outdoor activity and holiday destination with areas of lush forest, walking trails, rivers and lakes, and a variety of unique attractions.

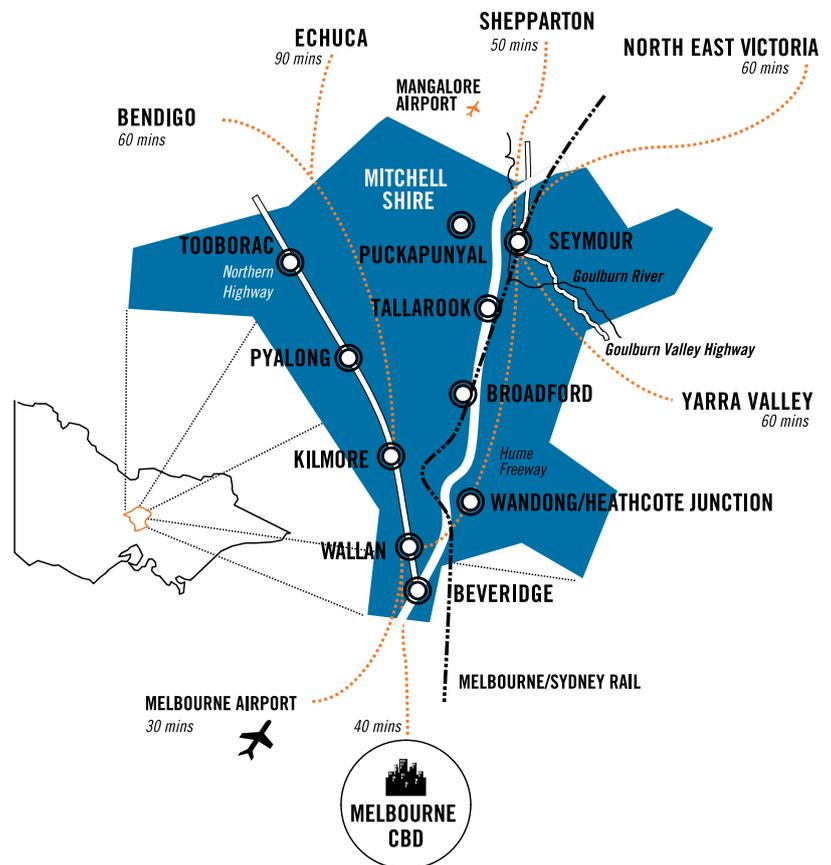
Located within the Hume Corridor, the shire contains major road and rail infrastructure connecting Melbourne to Sydney.

Mitchell Shire has a high commuter workforce (more than 50% of residents work outside of the municipality) relying heavily on regional rail and road networks to travel to and from work and for day-to-day community activities.

Mitchell Shire has recently been identified by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning as the fastest growing municipality in Victoria with an estimated population growth of 4.5% from 2018 through to 2036. Most of this population growth is expected to be in the metropolitan residential growth corridor, with large housing estates already being developed and changing the landscape in the south of the municipal area.

Our rolling foothills, open farmland, mountain ranges, rivers and creeks contribute to a unique natural environment, however they come with the risk of natural disasters such as fires, storms and floods. Within this varied natural environment, several endangered and threatened species of flora and fauna have been identified.

As Mitchell Shire grows, urban areas spread into rural areas and more people move here to enjoy the beautiful natural environment. This creates a challenge for animal management strategies that balance the needs of the environment (including native fauna), pets, pet owners, and residents who do not own pets.

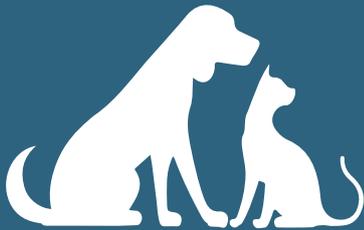


PETS IN MITCHELL SHIRE

As Mitchell Shire's human population continues to grow, so does its animal population.

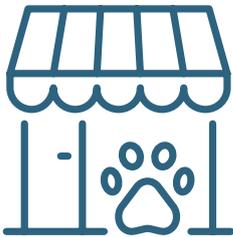
The number of dogs and cats registered within Mitchell Shire has fluctuated slightly over the past four years. Local Laws staff have worked to ensure the registration database is as accurate as possible and that unpaid registrations are followed up and animal records are removed from the database when animals move away from the shire, are sold, or pass away.

As of 1 July 2021, Mitchell Shire has:



Approximately 8500 registered DOGS
> 76% of which are desexed

Approximately 2200 registered CATS
> 98% of which are desexed



10 Registered Domestic Animal Businesses



3 Declared Dangerous dogs
2 Declared Menacing dogs
3 Restricted Breed dogs
and 2 registered Guard Dogs

DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT WITHIN MITCHELL SHIRE

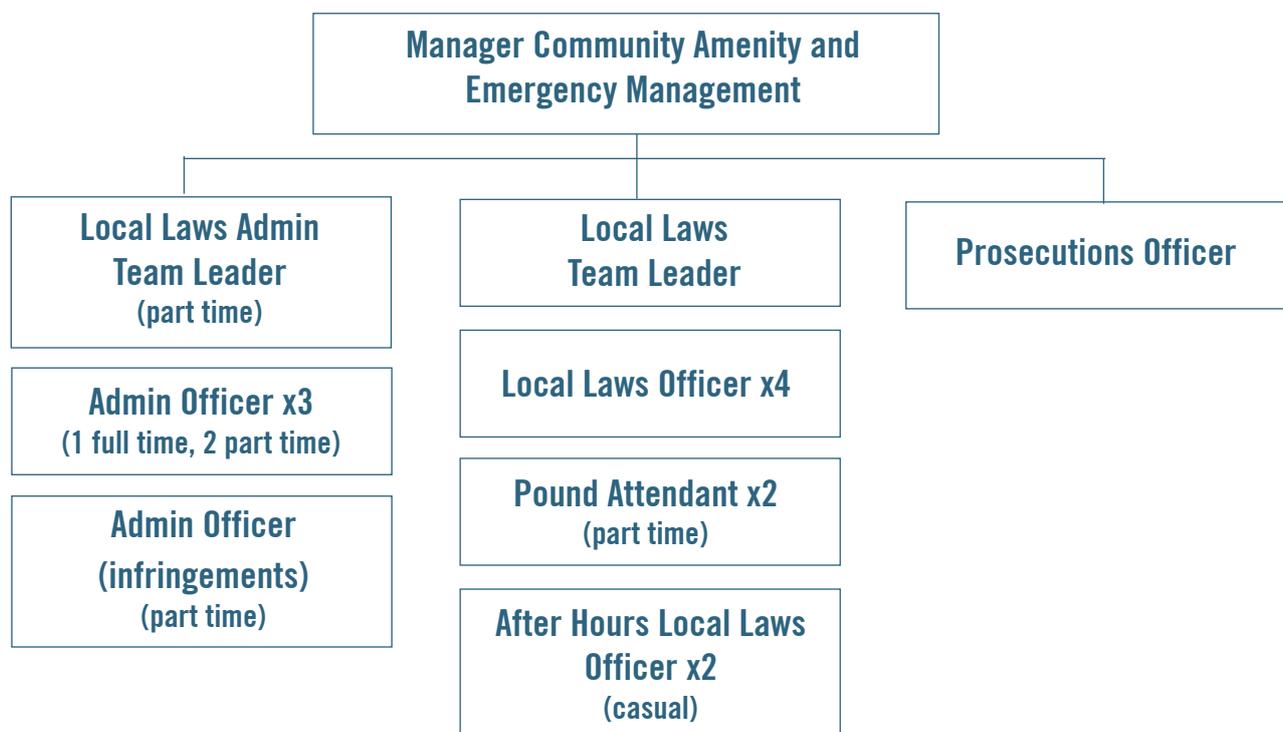
Administering the various Domestic Animal Management functions outlined in the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* is the responsibility of the Local Laws team.

The Local Laws team oversees a diverse array of council services and activities. This includes the enforcement of Council's Local Law, as well as responsibilities assigned to council under numerous pieces of legislation such as the *Environmental Protection Act 2017*, *Road Safety Act 1986*, *Impounding of Livestock Act 1994*.

It is estimated that approximately 60% of all Local Law staff activity relates to domestic animal management.

Mitchell Shire has four full time Local Laws Officers, supported by several Administration Officers and a Prosecution Officer

Mitchell Shire also runs its own Pound Facility, located in Broadford, which is staffed seven days a week to ensure the ongoing care of impounded or surrendered animals.



DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT WITHIN MITCHELL SHIRE

In 2020/21, the Local Laws team:

- ✓ Responded to just over 1600 complaints
- ✓ Issued 29 new Excess Animal Permits
- ✓ Hired out their cat traps over 100 times
- ✓ Collected 920 lost and straying dogs and cats, with half of these animals reunited with their owners within 48 hours



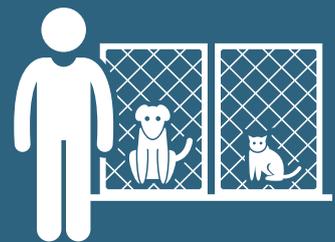
Over the last four years, the Local Laws team have:

- ✓ Issued 1364 animal related infringement notices
- ✓ Seized 39 dogs
- ✓ Had 108 dogs and 138 cats surrendered to them
- ✓ Conducted 75 inspections of Domestic Animal Business and Declared Dog premises
- ✓ Been Successful in 100% of Prosecution cases taken to Court



Mitchell Shire Pound:

- ✓ Handles on average between 1000-1200 dogs and cats every year
- ✓ 60% of all impounded animals are reunited with their owners, most within 2 days
- ✓ Only 40% of impounded dogs and less than 10% of cats are registered
- ✓ 32% of animals are rehomed



The 'Animals of Mitchell Shire' Facebook Page:

- ✓ Receives over 4000 views every day
- ✓ Has on average 300 comments, likes or shares every day
- ✓ Has the highest engagement rate of any of the Council's Social Media pages
- ✓ Provides 'real time' Lost and Found information for the Mitchell Shire Community



SECTION 2

OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN



2. OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN

In response to the feedback provided from across the community and our domestic animal management team, several key focus areas have been identified.

Some of these will form a specific focus during one of the calendar years of the plan, others will continue to remain a focus across the lifetime of the plan. Further detail of programs, strategies, and measures of success are detailed in Section 3.

Key Focus Areas for 2021-2025

1. More Dog Parks across the Shire

Exercise and enrichment opportunities have been shown to improve health and welfare for both dogs and their owners. Exercise and mental stimulation can also decrease the incidence of some behavioural problems in dogs by providing outlets for normal behaviours.

The provision of fenced dog parks allows owners to provide some off-leash exercise without the risks of their pets straying onto roads or getting away from them. It also helps prevent the issues seen when dogs are walked off leash in public places without being under effective control.

Through the life cycle of this plan, one of our major goals is to improve the facilities for dog owners, particularly in the urban growth areas of the municipality, with the hope that this will, in turn, promote positive outcomes across the wider community.

Council will endeavour to introduce a policy requiring developers to include provisions for fenced dog parks in every large-scale development, and council will also set aside areas for dog parks in suitable existing areas and as new public green spaces are developed.

Future dog parks will have a number of fenced sections, allowing for dogs of different sizes, or dogs who may need to be exercised away from other, unfamiliar, dogs to have an increased opportunity to exercise safely.

2. Focus on Education – for both Existing and New Pet Owners

Making improvements within animal management relies on pet owners better understanding community expectations and the responsibilities of pet ownership. In many cases pet owners are unaware of state and council requirements relating to pet ownership.

Each year of the plan will have one or more education campaigns aimed at supporting council initiatives, promoting responsible pet ownership and improving the welfare of dogs and cats.

Mitchell Shire will also look at diversifying the way in which important pet ownership messages are delivered considering technology advances and the increased use of virtual platforms and social media following the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Further Improvement in Rehoming rates

Mitchell Shire aims to increase the number of dogs and cats who are successfully rehomed from its pound facility.

By increasing community awareness of animals requiring homes, and by working with other rehoming organisations or groups, the goal is to increase the percentage of stray or surrendered animals, in particular cats, who find new homes.

Summary of Our Plan in the Coming Four Years

The table below outlines the key programs and strategies we intend to deliver in the coming four years.

These key areas, along with additional objectives and strategies aimed at ensuring we are meeting or exceeding our day-to-day responsibilities under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, are detailed further in Section 3 together with delivery timeframes and measures of success.

YEAR	KEY FOCUS AREAS
All Four Years 2021-2025	<p>Increase the number of Fenced Off Leash Dog Parks Across the Shire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fenced Off-Leash Dog Parks to be developed in Seymour and Beveridge in first year of the plan, followed by an additional 1-2 facilities each year for the duration of the plan - Fenced Off-Leash Parks to become a required inclusion for all large-scale housing developments as part of the planning approval process
	<p>Cat Curfew Education, Awareness and Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aiming to increase cat owner awareness of the requirements, along with information about how they can safely contain their cat and help their cat to adjust to periods of confinement - Conduct a number of Council-run Cat Trapping events
Year 1 - 2022	<p>Additional Focus – Promotion of Council’s Cat Trap Program</p>
	<p>Additional Focus – Review of provisions for domestic animals during emergencies as part of Mitchell Shire Emergency Management Framework review</p>
Year 2 - 2023	<p>Additional Focus – Increasing our rehoming rate for cats – working with animal welfare and rehoming organisations within the Shire to increase the number of cats who are successfully rehomed from the Mitchell Shire pound</p>
	<p>Additional Focus – Education Campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The importance and benefits of Registering Your Pets - Pet Identification - Keeping your Contact Details up to date
Year 3 - 2024	<p>Additional Focus – Registration of Dogs and Cats – with a particular focus on residents new to the municipality, and those residents who have an active Pet Exchange Register ‘Source Number’</p>
	<p>Additional Focus – Awareness Campaign – ‘Dogs in Public Places’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aiming to reduce the incidence of Dogs Attacks and Dogs at Large across the municipality - Informing the community on what they need to do to report a dog attack or a dog at large - Promoting awareness of dog behaviour, the importance of reading your dog’s body language and owner responsibilities at Dog Parks

2. OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN

Year 4 - 2025	Additional Focus – <i>Development of an ‘On-Leash’ order, expanding the current 3 ‘on-leash’ areas within the Shire. This would mean that dogs would be required to be kept on leash unless within a fenced dog park, or in a designated ‘off-leash’ area.</i>
	Additional Focus – <i>Education campaigns</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Requirements for breeding of dogs and cats</i>- <i>Pets and your mental health</i>- <i>The importance of training your dog</i>

Estimated Costs of Implementing this Plan

Preliminary costing estimates for delivery of the objectives outlined within this plan suggest that \$195,000 will be required over the lifetime of the plan to fund the various initiatives.

Note: costing estimates do not include wages/salary for Domestic Animal Management Staff.

Costing estimates can be broken down to:

Year 1:

- ✓ The cost of implementation of fenced dog off leash parks will be shared between Mitchell Shire Council and Developers with consideration already in the 2022 – 2023 Capital Works budget for parks in Seymour and Beveridge
- ✓ Education campaigns

Year 2:

- ✓ Investigation and consideration of further fenced off leash parks in Broadford and Wallan
- ✓ Education campaigns
- ✓ Promotion of Cat Desexing via discount vouchers

Year 3:

- ✓ Provision of an additional short-term contract Staff resource to focus on database cross referencing and follow up of unpaid registration fees.
- ✓ Awareness and education campaigns

Year 4:

- ✓ Development of “On leash Order” and education campaigns
- ✓ Promotion of Cat Desexing via discount vouchers

Throughout the life of the Plan there will be a requirement to ensure Authorised Officers are suitably trained to perform their role.

SECTION 3

STRATEGIES



3.1. TRAINING OF AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Mitchell Shire Council is committed to ensuring that its Animal Management Staff are appropriately trained and competent in their duties. This means that they can deliver an effective and professional service to the community, and properly administer and enforce the requirements of the various Acts.

All Local Laws officers must meet the requirements of their position descriptions. The minimum qualification requirement being a Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation (or equivalent). All officers also undergo an induction program and are trained in Mitchell Shire's standard operating procedures.

Local Laws Officers are 'Authorised' under multiple pieces of legislation. For Domestic Animal Management matters, authorisation is granted under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*.

The Manager Community Amenity and Emergency Management maintains a register of all Authorised Officer Training. (Please Refer to Appendix 4)

In the period covered by the last Domestic Animal Management Plan, all Local Laws staff received training designed to upskill them for their roles.

Two of the newer Local Laws Officers are currently completing their Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation and Certificate IV in Statutory Compliance (Government). Pound Staff underwent formal training in Behaviour, Welfare and Wellbeing in the Shelter environment, and undertook training in Temperament Assessment.

All Local Laws staff attended one or more courses or training sessions relating to

Workplace Health and Safety, Defensive Driving, Dealing with Aggressive Customers, Conflict Management or First Aid.

Local Laws Officers attended a variety of training sessions offered by Animal Welfare Victoria, RSPCA and the Municipal Association of Victoria. Refresher courses will continue which will include the collection of evidence, preparation of briefing papers and investigation.

How we Plan to Further Train and Upskill our Authorised Officers

In the coming four years, our plan is to continue to ensure that all our Local Laws Officers complete the courses they are currently enrolled in and undertake training as opportunities arise. Two areas of focus include expanding the number of Local Laws Staff who can conduct temperament assessments, and to increase the number who qualify as Authorised Microchip Implanters to assist in reducing the time dogs and cats are required to stay in the pound.

Training plans for each officer are reviewed annually and are aligned with departmental goals and targets, however they may be limited due to the availability and scheduling of training courses.



Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 1: Ensure all officers are trained and skilled

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Maintain a register of Authorised Officer training	Ongoing	<i>Animal Management Officers</i>
Ensure all new Authorised Officers have completed their minimum training requirements within 6 months of appointment	Ongoing	<i>Animal Management Officers</i>
Identify additional training opportunities to upskill all staff involved in animal management via completion of annual goals and performance appraisals	Annual	<i>Animal Management Officers</i>
Ensure all officers attend industry training and seminars	Ongoing	<i>Animal Management Officers</i>



3.2. PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP

Owning a pet has been shown to have many benefits - they provide companionship, a reason to get out and exercise, and they facilitate social interactions. However, this comes with a responsibility to ensure that the needs of the pet are met, and that it is not allowed to become a nuisance.

Responsible pet ownership is the key to ensuring that the physical and behavioural needs of dogs and cats are met, and that they do not negatively impact the wider community.

Mitchell Shire Council understands that many pet owners are unaware of the laws relating to the keeping of animals, and many new pet owners may not understand how best to meet their pet's needs. For this reason, education of owners and the wider community has been an ongoing focus across a number of Domestic Animal Management Plans.

Education campaigns in the last four years have taken advantage of new ways to deliver important messages to pet owners. The increased use of social media platforms such as the 'Animals of Mitchell' Facebook page, electronic communications, text messaging and emails have complimented traditional paper-based and 'in person' delivery methods.

Over the last four years, Mitchell Shire has hosted three very successful Pet Expos aimed at promoting all aspects of responsible pet ownership. The Expo scheduled for 2020 had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions, but planning is already underway for a return during the lifetime of this plan. In the past the Expo's have proven a wonderful way to reach many dog and cat owners, as well as those considering adding a pet to their family.

Several resources have been developed to assist pet owners, such as a '10-point plan for Pet Ownership in Mitchell Shire', along with expansion of the information accessible to pet owners via the Mitchell Shire Council Website.

Throughout the four years of the previous plan, there have been numerous online education campaigns, door knocks, and park visits relating to all aspects of responsible pet ownership – from introducing the cat curfew, to promoting the benefits of registration. Mitchell Shire has participated in the Municipal Association of Victoria's reduced cost desexing scheme and encouraged all pet owners to update their pet's microchip details.

Moving forward, Mitchell Shire Council has already committed to several key education campaigns (as outlined in the Key Focus Areas) and the success and 'reach' of the various delivery methods will be monitored and assessed in light of the target audiences.

Although education can certainly assist in helping pet owners better understand their responsibilities, there is also a need to provide facilities that assist in achieving these outcomes and to encourage compliance. Therefore, one of the key focusses for the lifecycle of this plan is the provision of more fenced dog parks.

The goal is to provide owners the opportunity to exercise their dogs, whilst indirectly addressing dog-related issues that negatively impact others within the community - dogs at large, dogs off leash in public places, and nuisance behaviours that result from under-stimulation and lack of physical exercise.

Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 2: Promote Responsible Pet Ownership to all dog and cat owners

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target audience
<p>Conduct education campaigns relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Registration > Microchipping and Identification > Cat Curfew/Cat Trapping > Dogs in Public Places > Benefits of Pet Ownership/Mental Health 	Years 1-4	<p><i>Owners of registered dogs and cats</i></p> <p><i>Owners of unregistered dogs and cats</i></p> <p><i>Prospective dog and cat owners</i></p> <p><i>Dog and cat owners</i></p>
<p>Continue to explore different ways to deliver education materials using both traditional methods and newer technologies. Consider how council's Responsible Pet Ownership messages can be modified to target new residents and Mitchell Shire's Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities</p>	Ongoing	<p><i>Owners of registered dogs and cats</i></p> <p><i>Owners of unregistered dogs and cats</i></p> <p><i>Prospective dog and cat owners</i></p> <p><i>Members of Mitchell Shire's CALD communities</i></p>
<p>Reinstate yearly Pet Expo post COVID</p>	Annual	<p><i>Owners of registered dogs and cats</i></p> <p><i>Owners of unregistered dogs and cats</i></p> <p><i>Prospective dog and cat owners</i></p>



3.3 REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Registration

Dog and cat registration assists in the return of lost animals to their owner, including direct return without the need for them to enter the pound. The fees paid each year by pet owners also fund the Council's animal management services such as the Mitchell Shire pound, and Local Laws team.

Registration of both dogs and cats forms Part 2 of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*. Mitchell Shire Council is required to administer this process according to the rules set out in this part of the Act.

Council is required under the Act to pay a portion of each registration fee to the Victorian State Government to fund the activities of Animal Welfare Victoria (currently \$4.16 per animal registered and \$20 per domestic animal business registration, increasing by the consumer price index (CPI) every year).

During the community survey, there were many comments relating to registration – with many of the responses highlighting that the community does not understand registration or the legislation that dictates how registration must occur within Victoria.

Many of the suggestions we received relating to registration certainly have merit, however this is an area that Council has very little ability to change as the process, renewal interval, and basic fee structure are all dictated by state level legislation.

The number of dog and cat registrations received by Mitchell Shire fluctuates from year to year. This is the result of new animals being added to the register as well as other animals being removed because they have been sold or given away, have moved out of the shire, or have passed away. There are also owners who simply fail to renew their registration.

Registration Requirements Outlined in the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*.

- > Every Dog and Cat three (3) months of age and over must be registered with your local council
- > Registrations must be renewed by 10 April each year
- > Registered dogs and cats must wear an identification marker when outside their premises
- > All dogs and cats being registered in Victoria for the first time must be microchipped before they are registered
- > The current fee schedule outlined in the Act allows for reduced registration fees for pensioners, registered foster carers, and for animals who meet certain requirements (de-sexed, over 10 years of age, obedience certified, working farm dogs, breeding animals who are not desexed but whose owners are a Domestic Animal Business or a member of an Applicable Organisation, registered foster carers).

Renewal of registrations is currently encouraged through a series of timed reminders in a variety of formats (mail, media releases, social media) in the lead up to the April 10 renewal deadline, supported by a series of follow-up strategies (text messages, emails and phone calls) in the weeks after. Targeted door knocks have also been employed for lapsed registrations in past years, however the COVID-19 restrictions have meant that door knocks have not been possible in the last few years.

Capturing first time registration is an ongoing challenge, especially with many new residents and new pet owners unaware of the requirement to register their pets.

During the lifecycle of the last plan, a number of activities were conducted to make registering pets easier, and to remove some of the barriers preventing owners from registering their animals.

An electronic application form was introduced, allowing pet owners to complete their pet's registration application details online. Pet owners who signed up for Council's eNotices now receive their registration renewal notice electronically, and pet owners now can pay their registration fee over the phone. Although these are all steps forward, at this stage the percentage of dog registration renewals utilising these newer technologies remain low.

Discounted registration and renewal fees were offered to those attending the three Pet Expos that were held in 2017, 2018 and 2019, and discounted fees were introduced for pets recently adopted from shelters, and for dogs and cats under 12 months of age to acknowledge the fact that most veterinarians within the shire recommend desexing occurs around 6-8 months of age. Discounts were also given for adult cats

with the introduction of the cat curfew.

The number of dogs and cats permitted without a permit has remained the same throughout the lifecycle of the last Domestic Animal Management Plan, with a limit of 2 dogs and 2 cats on all residential and semi-rural properties, and 6 dogs and 4 cats on rural properties.

Since April 2019, Mitchell Shire transitioned its excess animal permits from requiring annual renewal, to being a lifelong permit if there were no specific animal and property changes. In 2019/20 87 Excess Animal Permits were renewed and/or approved, dropping to 29 new permit applications in 2020/21.

Lapsed registrations have been a target for Local Laws Admin staff with a revised process now in place that sees text messages sent to owners before the renewal notices are issued, during the renewal period and after the due date has lapsed if registrations are not renewed. Once the grace period for renewal has lapsed, renewals become subject to a late fee, and people found with unregistered dogs may be issued infringement notices.



3.3 REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 3: Improve the accuracy of the Mitchell Shire pet registration database and identify animals that may require registration

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Periodic cross-referencing of microchip registries to obtain current details of dogs and cats within the municipality that are microchipped	Ongoing	Owners of unregistered dogs and cats in Mitchell Shire
Investigate ways in which new residents and new pet owners can be better educated around the need to register their pets, including increasing the reach for the “10-point plan for Owning Pets in Mitchell Shire”	Ongoing	New residents of Mitchell Shire Dog and cat owners

Outcome 4: Increase the number of dog and cat registrations each year as a % of the population of Mitchell Shire, and ensure all unpaid dog and cat registrations are followed up

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Continue to promote registration renewals through Council’s website, the Council’s on-hold message, customer service centres and social and traditional media	Ongoing	Owners of registered dogs and cats Owners of unregistered dogs and cats Prospective dog and cat owners
Continue to undertake proactive doorknocks throughout the municipality	Ongoing	Owners of unregistered dogs and cats
Conduct Education Campaigns relating to registration, the benefits of registration, and the reasons why registering your dogs and cats is important	Annual	Owners of registered dogs and cats Owners of unregistered dogs and cats Prospective dog and cat owners Non-pet owning community

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Additional short-term contract staff resource to be employed specifically to conduct phone follow ups for lapsed registrations, and to conduct cross referencing of registration database with other data sources	Year 3	<i>Owners of unregistered dogs and cats</i>
Visible presence at Dog Parks and popular reserves to check that dogs are registered	Ongoing	<i>Owners of registered dogs and cats</i> <i>Owners of unregistered dogs and cats</i>

Outcome 5: Ensure Council Process and Policy documentation relating to dog and cat registration is up to date and incorporates any recent legislative changes

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Review internal procedures, policies, and documents relating to registration process annually	Internal	<i>Mitchell Shire</i>

Outcome 6: Increase the number of permitted animals on properties greater than 0.4 hectares

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Ensure Council's proposed Local Law better defines property types and increase the permitted numbers for properties over 0.4 hectare from 2 dogs and 2 cats to 3 dogs and 3 cats	Internal	<i>Mitchell Shire</i>

3.3 REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Breeding of Dogs and Cats in Mitchell Shire

Since the last Mitchell Shire Domestic Animal Management Plan was developed, the Victorian State Government introduced a bill to parliament that was aimed at stamping out illegal puppy farms. One of the changes that resulted from this was the introduction of a 'Pet Exchange Register'.

The Pet Exchange register is an online database maintained by the Victorian State Government to promote responsible breeding of dogs and cats, and to improve traceability of dogs and cats being sold in Victoria.

'Any person or business advertising to sell or give away a dog, cat, puppy or kitten in Victoria needs to be enrolled on the Pet Exchange Register and include their source number along with each animal's microchip number in all advertisements, including social media.'

You can learn more about the Pet Exchange Register by visiting their website - per.animalwelfare.vic.gov.au

Mitchell Shire fully supports the state government's initiatives in relation to the breeding of dogs and cats and closely monitors registrations, advertisements, and the pet exchange register for those who may be conducting illegal breeding activities within the municipality.

Mitchell Shire does not have any commercial dog or cat breeding establishments (which now can only be approved by the Minister) nor do we have any registered Domestic Animal Breeding Businesses.

Mitchell Shire is, however, home to several dog and cat breeders who are members of one of the Applicable Organisations recognised under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (Dogs Victoria, Master Dog Breeders Association, Feline Control Council etc.)

Termed 'Recreational Breeders' under the new definitions, these breeders are limited to a maximum of 10 fertile females and must comply with council permit requirements and permitted animal numbers for their property type. Recreational breeders receive reduced registration fees for dogs and cats that are kept entire for breeding and must provide proof of current membership at the time of renewal.

Under the revised Act, there is a new category of breeder identified called 'Micro-breeders' – these are breeders with less than three fertile females. Micro-breeders do not qualify for reduced registration fees.

Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 7: Ensure Council Process and Policy documentation relating to dog and cat registration is up to date and incorporates any recent legislative changes

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Periodic cross-referencing of the Pet Exchange Register to obtain details of dog and cat breeders within the municipality that have an active source number	Ongoing	Owners of unregistered dogs and cats in Mitchell Shire

Outcome 8: Improve the accuracy of the pet registration database, and identify potential Domestic Animal Breeding Businesses by cross-referencing identified Micro-Breeders

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Cross reference details of Micro-breeders within the Shire to ensure they are complying with registration requirements and permitted numbers	Year 3	Owners of unregistered dogs and cats in Mitchell Shire



3.3 REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Microchipping

It is now compulsory for all dogs and cats in Victoria to be microchipped prior to being sold or given away, and since July 2020, it has been mandatory to provide a source number as part of the ‘prescribed information’ that the authorised implanter is required to collect at the time of microchipping.

These changes have seen the number of animals in the community without a microchip drop to a point where activities aimed at increasing microchipping rates such as community microchipping days are no longer viable.

Instead, the focus has moved to ensuring that owner details are current and up to date on the microchip registry to facilitate return of lost or straying animals to their owners.

There is still some confusion within the community in relation to the difference between microchipping and registration with responses to the community survey suggesting that they felt that there was some duplication – both in the payment of fees and in the handling of data. Unfortunately, this is unavoidable as both processes are subject to the requirements of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* and administered by different authorities.

Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 9: Improve the Community’s understanding of the importance of keeping their pet’s microchip details up to date

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Education Campaign encouraging Owners to update their Microchip details with the relevant registry	Ongoing	<i>Owners of microchipped dogs and cats in Mitchell Shire</i>



3.4 PREVENTING NUISANCE

One of our biggest challenges is balancing the needs of pet owners, non-pet owners, those that use public spaces, and the wider community. Preventing the negative impacts of pet ownership within the municipality is an important part of Domestic Animal Management.

Dogs can cause a nuisance when they bark excessively, wander at large, are not kept under effective control by their owner in public places and when their faeces are not picked up in public places.

Cats can create nuisance when they are allowed to wander at large and can pose a risk to native wildlife and the natural environment. Cats may also create health issues by defaecating in other people's property or public places.

Almost every single respondent to our Community Survey indicated that they had been affected by nuisance behaviour of dogs and cats in some way.

Barking

There have been a consistent number of barking dog complaints throughout 2018-2020 with Local Laws staff handling somewhere between 130-134 complaints each year. Interestingly, this number dropped to 113 during the 2020/21 year, which may be due to an increase in owners working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

77% of barking complaints originate from the townships of Kilmore, Seymour and Wallan.

Council does not accept anonymous complaints, and the community survey indicated that this was one reason that may discourage people reporting barking dogs to council. During the lifecycle of the previous plan, a thorough review was undertaken of the barking dog process and procedure, and additional information about barking dogs was added to the Mitchell Shire Council website.

Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 10: Improve the process and speed up the resolution of barking dog complaints

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Continue to update the information that Mitchell Shire provides to the public about nuisance barking, its prevention, and how barking complaints are handled	Annual	<i>Dog owners</i> <i>Residents experiencing excessive barking from a neighbouring property</i>

3.4 PREVENTING NUISANCE

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Review Mitchell Shire’s procedures for dealing with excessive barking with a view to reduce the time taken to process a barking dog complaint	Annual	<i>Owners of dogs which are the subject of a barking dog complaint</i> <i>Residents who lodge a barking dog complaint with Council</i>

Dogs at Large

Dogs at large represent a significant drain on Domestic Animal Management resources, due the amount of time and effort required to respond to reports of animals at large and the costs of impoundment.

The number of dogs found ‘wandering at large’, or ‘not securely confined’ in Mitchell Shire has remained constant, with between 670-680 animals impounded each year since 2016, however this number dropped significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic with just over 600 impounded in 2019/20, and only 440 in 2020/21. This may be largely attributed to the increase in people working from or staying at home during this time.

Some of these dogs found wandering at large have escaped their property without their owners being aware, although there is a proportion of owners who allow their dogs to roam. This creates an increased risk of dog attack, increased incidence of dog droppings in streets and parks, and can impact those wanting to use public spaces. There is also the risk that the roaming animal will be injured or cause a traffic accident if it strays near a road.

Dogs not under ‘Effective Control’

Council has a limited order in place under Section 26 of the Act that requires dogs to be leashed on the Broadford Walking Trail, Bushland Park off Goulburn Valley Highway Seymour and Seymour Walking Track, from Whiteheads Creek end to Seymour/Tooborac end Seymour.

In all other public places, dogs are required to be kept under effective control.

With the increase in population density across the shire, and the growth of existing townships, council is considering extending the ‘On-Leash’ orders to address the problems associated with dogs off-leash in these areas.

Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 11: Reduce the nuisance and risks associated with the presence of dogs at large in public places

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Increase the number of fenced dog parks available to dog owners across the shire	Years 1-4	<i>Dog owners Mitchell Shire Community</i>
Review the need for increased Section 26 Orders requiring dogs to be leashed in townships within the shire	Year 4	<i>Dog owners Mitchell Shire Council Community</i>
Education Campaigns promoting the need to keep your pets contained to your property, the need for secure fencing, and ways in which you can meet the behavioural and exercise needs of your dog	Years 1-4	<i>Dog owners Mitchell Shire Community</i>
Education Campaign and strategic signage reminding owners of their responsibility to pick and appropriately dispose of any faeces	Ongoing	<i>Mitchell Shire residents</i>



3.4 PREVENTING NUISANCE

Cat Complaints

There has been a slight decrease in the number of complaints regarding cats - from 343 in 2017/18 to 318 in 2020/21.

Most of these complaints originate from Broadford, Kilmore, Seymour and Wallan and relate to cats trespassing onto neighbouring properties.

Cat Curfew

In October 2019 Mitchell Shire Council introduced a Cat Curfew under Section 25 of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*.

This Curfew requires all cats to be confined to their owner's property between sunset and sunrise with the aim to reduce the impact of pets on native wildlife and to protect our natural environment.

In support of this new requirement, there was an education campaign, along with a series of council run cat-trapping programs.

Currently the Domestic Animal Management team have 16 cat traps that can be hired out to residents who make a complaint about wandering cats. There is a documented protocol that must be followed, and trapped cats are collected by the Animal Management Team and taken to the Mitchell Shire Pound.

Cats that are trapped are scanned for a microchip and checked against registration records. 'Owned' cats are returned to their owners along with educational material relating to the cat curfew. If the cat is not registered, the owners are required to remedy this, and they may receive a fine. Continual breaches can also lead to impoundment of the cat and pound fees. 'Feral' and 'unowned' cats are impounded in accordance with the requirements of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* and are then assessed in relation to their suitability for rehoming.

The number of cats impounded by Mitchell Shire Council over the last four years has fluctuated slightly with 447 in 2017/18, 512 in 2018/19, 368 in 2019/20, and 446 in 2020/21.



Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 12: Reduce the number of cat nuisance complaints

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Promote Awareness of the Cat Curfew	Years 1-4	<i>Cat owners</i> <i>Prospective cat owners</i>
Provide increased education for owners of cats to help them understand how they can better contain their cats	Years 1-4	<i>Cat owners</i> <i>Prospective cat owners</i>
Provide information to assist cat owners to train their cats to return home, and on how to provide suitable enrichment activities during confinement	Years 1-4	<i>Cat owners</i> <i>Prospective cat owners</i>
Promote Mitchell Shire's Cat trapping program	Ongoing	<i>Mitchell Shire residents</i>



3.5 MINIMISING THE RISK OF DOG ATTACKS WITHIN MITCHELL SHIRE

Dog attacks not only have the potential to cause injuries but can also lead to members of the community not feeling safe in public places.

Dog attacks can be directed to people, livestock or other animals. They can occur in the family home, if a dog is wandering at large, or when a dog is with its owner in a public place. Many dog attacks go unreported.

Mitchell Shire's mix of rural and urban fringe presents a number of challenges in relation to the potential for dog attacks to occur.

- > Residents in newly developed areas may move into a home that does not yet have adequate fencing to securely contain their pet dog
- > In areas where there is a lot of construction and development, there is the potential for dogs that are brought to the construction sites to be inadequately supervised or contained
- > Many residents new to a rural lifestyle may not be aware of the potential for their dogs to attack livestock and other animals, and not realise that many dogs will escape through farm style fencing and roam
- > Owners who are exercising their dogs may not have adequate control of their dog when off-leash or at a dog park
- > Some owners do not understand that their dog should not be allowed out to roam

Unfortunately, dog attack reports have been relatively consistent over the last four years with an average of 55 reports of attacks directed to other animals each year and an average of 17 reports of attacks directed at people each year.

Dog owners who responded to our Community Survey indicated that their pets often had very little training apart from that they received at home, and there was concern raised about the availability of dog training classes in the Shire.

Prevention or minimisation of dog attacks largely relies on dog owners being responsible for their animals – training and socialising their dogs, having adequate fencing to confine their dogs, making sure their dogs are on leash where required, and having them under effective control if they are off leash.

Owners also need to use some common sense in managing their dog to not put them in a situation where they become overly aroused/excited or feel threatened. This includes managing their dogs within the confines of dog parks as well.

Whilst Mitchell Shire Council aims to endeavour to reduce the number of dog attacks, this can only be achieved by educating dog owners of their responsibilities and encourage dog attacks to be reported to council.

Key initiatives to date have included widespread promotion of responsible dog ownership via a variety of platforms, communication with dog owners during park patrols, and proactive door knocks.

Mitchell Shire have also promoted several State Government initiatives aimed at reducing the incidence of dog bites such as the 'We Are Family' programs, 'Living Safely with Dogs' Program and 'Pet Town' which is an interactive learning tool for kindergarten and primary school aged children.

Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 13: Reduce the number of dog attacks in public places

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Education campaign promoting increased training and socialisation for all dogs along with responsible management of dogs in public places	Years 3 and 4	<i>Dog owners</i>
Review the need for increased Section 26 Orders requiring dogs to be leashed in townships within the shire	Year 4	<i>Dog owners Mitchell Shire Council Community</i>
Education Campaign promoting the need to keep your pets contained to your property	Year 3	<i>Dog owners</i>

Outcome 14: Increase public awareness of how to report dog attacks

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Improve public awareness of what constitutes a dog attack and how to report attacks (across a variety of information platforms/delivery methods)	Ongoing	<i>Mitchell Shire Council residents</i>
Promote the outcomes of prosecutions relating to dog attacks to the community	Ongoing	<i>Mitchell Shire Council residents</i>



3.6 MANAGING DANGEROUS, MENACING AND RESTRICTED BREED DOGS

The *Domestic Animal Act 1994* has special requirements and provisions relating to dogs that have been declared dangerous, menacing, or of a restricted breed.

Dogs may be declared dangerous if they attack another animal or human, or if they are used or trained as a guard dog (such as those dogs protecting property/premises).

Menacing Dogs are those that have been declared menacing due to rushing at or biting a person where that bite is not of a serious nature.

Restricted Breed dogs include those of the following breeds: Japanese Tosa, Fila Brasileiro, Dogo Argentino, Presa Canario and American Pit Bull Terrier.

Owning and keeping these dogs involves a set of responsibilities to ensure that the risk to the community is minimised. This includes requirements for secure housing, signs and identification, and a requirement that the animals is, at all times, muzzled and on leash when off the owner's property.

Council is committed to ensuring such dogs are identified, that owners are fully aware of their responsibilities and that any breaches are dealt with promptly. All new registration applications for American Staffordshire Terriers are flagged for visual inspection by a Local Laws Officer as part of the registration process.

There are currently 3 declared dangerous dogs, 2 declared menacing dogs, 3 restricted breed dogs and 2 guard dogs registered with Mitchell Shire Council. (Data correct as of 1 July 2021)

Owners of these dogs are subject to annual and random inspections of their premises to ensure ongoing compliance with housing requirements.

There are no discounts for registration of Dangerous, Menacing or Restricted breed dogs, and all must be de-sexed and microchipped to qualify for registration. Details of these animals are recorded on the Victorian Declared Dogs Registry.



Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 15: Effectively inspect and audit all declared dog premises annually to ensure they are compliant with legislation and regulations

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Conduct property inspections for all premises housing a declared dangerous, menacing, restricted breed or guard dog	Annual	<i>Owners of declared, dangerous, menacing, restricted breed and guard dogs registered in Mitchell Shire</i>

Outcome 16: Educate the community about the responsibilities of keeping of a declared, menacing or restricted breed dog

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Continue to provide information about the risks and responsibilities of owning a declared dog via Council's website, social and traditional media and at the annual Pet Expo	Ongoing	<i>Owners of declared dogs Mitchell Shire Council residents</i>
Maintain higher registration fees for declared dogs (i.e., no discount)	Ongoing	<i>Owners of declared dogs Mitchell Shire Council residents</i>

Outcome 17: Monitor the possible presence of dangerous or restricted breed dogs in the Shire

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Cross-reference microchip database information with current pet registration database for potential restricted breed dogs	Annual	<i>Owners of restricted breed dogs that should be registered with Mitchell Shire Council Mitchell Shire Council residents</i>
Undertake random patrols of industrial areas and building sites to identify locations that might have guard dogs	Ongoing	<i>Owners of guard dogs at industrial sites and building sites</i>

3.7 ADDRESSING OVERPOPULATION AND HIGH EUTHANASIA RATES

Overpopulation

There is ongoing concern within the community regarding over-breeding and the incidence of ‘puppy farms’ where breeding animals are subjected to poor welfare conditions.

The State Government has taken a very strong stance against the breeding of dogs and cats and introduced limits to the number of breeding animals that Domestic Breeding Businesses and Recreational breeders can have – with the maximum number of breeding females capped at 10 for any breeding operation.

Commercial scale breeding establishments, with more than 10 fertile females, can now only be approved by the Minister directly.

Mitchell Shire does not have any Domestic Breeding Businesses or Commercial Breeding Establishments, however there are Recreational Breeders and Micro-Breeders within the municipality. Monitoring of potential unregistered breeding establishments is

addressed in Sections 3.3 and 3.8.

Mitchell Shire Council understands that the other way to approach issues with overpopulation, unwanted litters and unowned animals, is to promote the desexing of dogs and cats. Although there is not yet a mandatory desexing order in Mitchell Shire, incentives such as reduced registration fees for desexed animals and the provision of a desexing voucher scheme aim to ensure as many animals as possible across the Shire are desexed.

In 2018, a cat desexing voucher scheme saw 11 vouchers issued to disadvantaged members of the community, this is a much lower uptake to similar schemes run previously. The number of cats impounded in the last four years has not decreased, and this is thought to be due to increased community awareness of wandering cats, and the implementation of several cat-trapping programs. Unfortunately, a high proportion of impounded cats are feral or unowned.



Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 18: Decrease the number of un-owned and unwanted cats in Mitchell Shire

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Desexing Voucher Scheme for disadvantaged members of the community offering \$100 towards the costs of desexing (capped at 50 vouchers)	Years 2 and 4	Cat owners

Euthanasia Rates

Mitchell Shire prides itself on having one of the highest rates of rehoming and lowest rates of euthanasia of any local council in Victoria. Reuniting animals with their owners is the priority for our animal management team. Of the animals collected during 2019/20 financial year, 60% were reclaimed and 32% rehomed.

Over the last four years, Council's Pound facility has handled between 1000 and 1200 impounded dogs and cats every year, with the 2020/21 registration year being an exception with only 920 animals.

The majority of these animals are found wandering at large, and thankfully, a large proportion are reunited with their owners within a couple of days. For those who cannot be identified, or whose owners do not come forward, a temperament assessment is conducted to assess their suitability for rehoming.

Mitchell Shire's 'Animals of Mitchell Shire' Facebook page is one of the council's most popular sites and receives an average of nearly 4000 views and over 300 comments, shares or likes every day. The page is used to educate the community about responsible pet ownership but also provides an excellent 'real time' platform for the reporting of animals that have been lost and found.

To assist with the rehoming of dogs and cats, Mitchell Shire has agreements with a number of shelters and rescue groups who aim to rehome as many animals as possible. This includes Save A Dog and Ingrid's Haven along with a number of breed-specific rescue groups.

Mitchell Shire rehomes between 50-75 dogs each year, and 230-280 cats, with a high emphasis on achieving positive outcomes for all animals who are deemed suitable for adoption. Unfortunately, a small percentage of animals are not suited for adoption (either through serious or chronic illness or due to temperament issues) and these animals are subsequently euthanised.

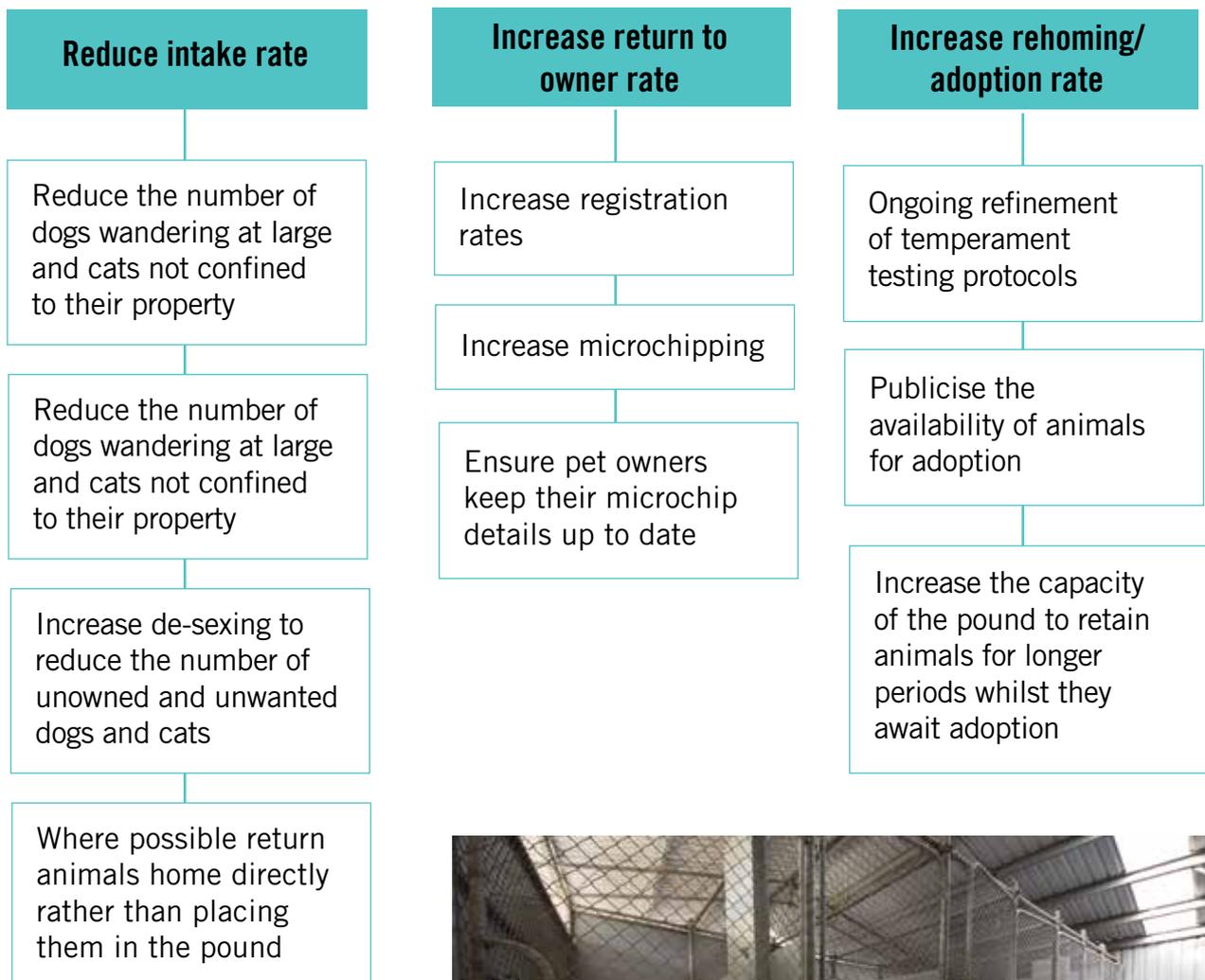
Mitchell Shire prides itself on having one of the highest rates of rehoming and lowest rates of euthanasia of any local council in Victoria and are constantly looking for ways to improve the number of animals successfully adopted out of its pound.

3.7 ADDRESSING OVERPOPULATION AND HIGH EUTHANASIA RATES

Euthanasia of animals in the pound is a function of:

- > The number of dogs and cats entering the pound.
- > The number of dogs and cats returned to their owner.
- > The number of dogs and cats that can be rehomed or adopted.

Strategies that can impact each of these factors make up a large proportion of this Domestic Animal Management Plan, and each has its part to play in reducing the number of animals that are euthanised.



Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 19: Achieve a reduction in the number of animals entering Mitchell Shire’s pound (as a % of the population¹)

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Where possible continue to return registered animals to their owners without impounding	Ongoing	<i>Dog and cat owners</i>
Reduce the number of dogs at large and cats wandering through education of pet owners	Years 1-4	<i>Dog and Cat owners Mitchell Shire Council residents</i>
Review all Section 84Y agreements with local veterinary clinics	Annual	<i>Veterinary clinics in Mitchell Shire</i>

Outcome 20: Increase the number of animals that are reunited with their owner or are rehomed

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Promotion of the benefits of registering dogs and cats, and the need to keep owner contact details up to date	Years 1-4	<i>Dog and cat owners New dog and cat owners Prospective dog and cat owners</i>
Add an ‘Adoption’ page to the Animal Management section of the Mitchell Shire Council website to allow prospective homes to lodge an ‘expression of interest’ in adopting a dog or cat	Year 1	<i>Prospective dog and cat owners</i>
Review best practice for temperament testing of animals being considered for rehoming	Internal	<i>Mitchell Shire Council Local Laws and Pound Staff</i>
Work closely with Ingrid’s Haven and other rehoming organisations to concentrate on increasing the number of cats that are successfully rehomed	Years 1-4	<i>Internal Shelters and rescue groups that take unclaimed and unowned animals.</i>

¹ it may be unrealistic to achieve an actual decrease in the number of animals entering the pound given sustained population growth

3.8 MANAGING DOMESTIC ANIMAL BUSINESSES WITHIN MITCHELL SHIRE

Under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, Mitchell Shire is responsible for the registration of Domestic Animal Businesses operating within the Shire. These include:

- > Pet Shops
- > Dog and Cat Breeding establishments where there are three or more fertile females and animals are sold (whether a profit is made or not) and whose proprietor is not a member of an Applicable Organisation
- > Animal shelters and pounds
- > Boarding facilities, including day care, overnight and home boarding
- > Dog training and rearing establishments

There are currently 10 registered Domestic Animal Businesses within Mitchell Shire with 4 Boarding establishments, 3 dog training establishments, and 3 animal shelters (including the Mitchell Shire Pound Facility). There are currently no pet shops or breeding and rearing establishments registered in the Shire. (Data correct as of 1 July 2021)

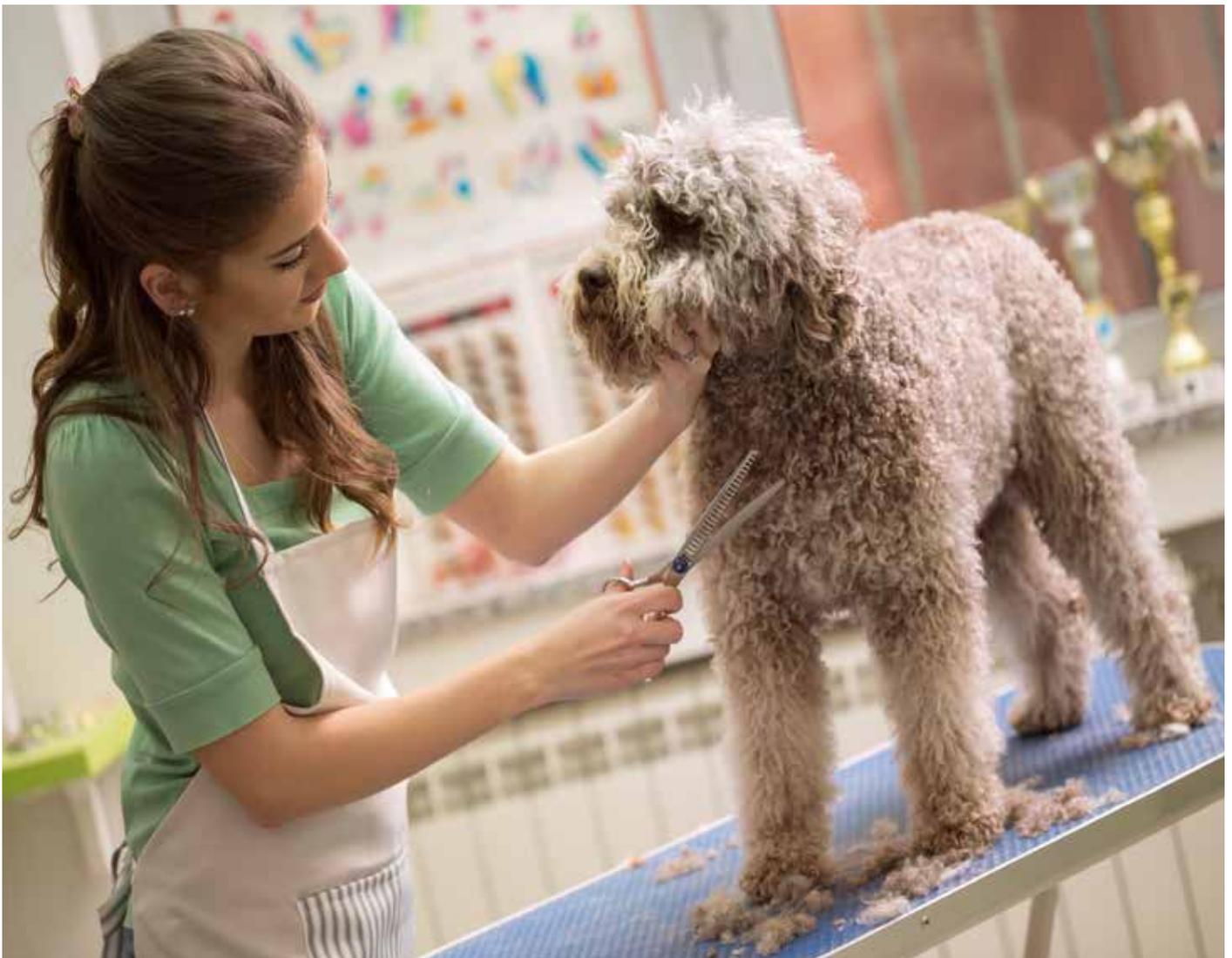
All the Domestic Animal Businesses are subject to annual and random inspections to ensure they are meeting their requirements under the relevant mandatory Code of Practice, and council takes seriously any complaints that relate to the operation of these establishments.

Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 21: Ensure domestic animal businesses (DABs) in Mitchell Shire are registered and comply with all legislative requirements including any new requirements that are introduced by the State Government

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Ensure yearly audits for Domestic Animal Businesses are undertaken	Annual	Existing DABs in Mitchell Shire
Conduct random inspections of Domestic Animal Businesses to ensure ongoing compliance	Ongoing	Existing DABs in Mitchell Shire
Investigate and act upon any complaints relating to the conduct of Domestic Animal Businesses	Ongoing	Existing DABs in Mitchell Shire
Monitor possible unregistered Domestic Animal Businesses by cross referencing the Pet Exchange Register, microchipping database and advertisements relating to sale of animals or conduct of businesses located within Mitchell Shire	Ongoing	Unregistered DABs in Mitchell Shire

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Review all information relating to Domestic Animal Businesses provided by council to ensure it remains up to date	Ongoing	<i>Existing and future DABs in Mitchell Shire</i> <i>Mitchell Shire Council residents</i>
Ensure that any changes to the requirements relating to Domestic Animal Businesses are publicised	As Required	<i>Existing and future DABs in Mitchell Shire</i>



3.9 OTHER MATTERS

Continuing to plan for Urban Growth

With a large part of the municipality located on the metropolitan fringe and in Melbourne's urban growth corridor, the population of Mitchell Shire is growing rapidly. As the human population continues to grow, so do the number of dogs and cats.

This presents a number of challenges for domestic animal management including ensuring council has the capacity and resourcing to meet the demands of the community.

New housing developments often lack the mature infrastructure that facilitates domestic animal management, and it is council's aim to incorporate facilities for pet owners into every new development. This includes the provision of fenced

dog parks in each and every new estate, and the encouragement of housing designs that make it easier for pet owners to confine their cats.

We understand that many new residents are likely to become first time pet owners, and they will need access to education and resources that explain clearly what is expected of a responsible pet owner.

A review of Mitchell Shire's pound facilities as part of the previous Domestic Animal Management Plan has determined that pound facilities in Broadford should be able to meet the demands of the shire over the next 10 years, however this relies on the success of a number of initiatives aimed at keeping animals out of the pound wherever possible.



Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 22: New residents are aware of Mitchell Shire’s requirements and expectations with regard to owning pets

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Investigate novel ways to ensure Council’s Responsible Pet Ownership messages (such as the 10 Point Plan for owning Animals in Mitchell Shire) are delivered to new residents	Ongoing	<i>New residents of Mitchell Shire</i>

Outcome 23: Ensure that information on effective confinement of pets is available to those planning on building a new home in Mitchell Shire

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Ensure that those planning on building a home within Mitchell Shire are provided with information about how they can ensure their pets are safely confined	Ongoing	<i>Prospective residents of Mitchell Shire Volume home builders</i>

Outcome 24: Ensure that the needs of dogs and their owners are considered in the planning and development of new green spaces, parks and reserves

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Fenced Off-Leash Parks to become a required inclusion for all large-scale housing developments as part of the planning approval process	Years 1-4	<i>Dog owners who exercise their dogs in parks and reserves All users of the Shire’s parks and reserves</i>
Work with Council’s Landscaping team to identify and develop suitable areas within existing townships for fenced off leash dog parks	Years 1-4	<i>Dog owners who exercise their dogs in parks and reserves All users of the Shire’s parks and reserves</i>

3.10 ANNUAL REVIEW OF PLAN AND ANNUAL REPORTING

Under Section 68A (3) of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, every Council must-

- (a) review its domestic animal management plan annually and if appropriate amend the plan
- (b) provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendment to the plan
- (c) publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

Key outcomes and strategies

Outcome 25: Ensure that the Mitchell Shire Domestic Animal Management Plan is reviewed and evaluated annually in accordance with the requirements of the Act

Proposed strategies/interventions	When	Target Audience
Provide the Secretary with a copy of the Plan and any amendments to the Plan	2021 and As required	<i>Secretary of DEDJTR</i>
Establish an annual timeline for reviewing and evaluating the Plan and associated animal management programs/initiatives	Annual	<i>Internal</i>
Review the Plan annually and if appropriate amend the Plan	Annual	<i>Internal</i>
Ensure each activity contained in the Plan is evaluated for its performance in meeting its applicable objective	Annual	<i>Internal</i>
If any activities are not undertaken as planned, note why the activity was not undertaken and consider whether it should be rescheduled or omitted from the Plan	Annual	<i>Internal</i>
If any activities did not meet expectations, the review will consider whether they should be amended or omitted from the Plan	As required	<i>Internal</i>
Ensure that an evaluation of the implementation of the Plan is published in the Council's annual report	Annual	<i>Internal</i>
If the plan is amended, the amended plan is submitted to the Secretary	As required	<i>Internal</i>

APPENDIXES



APPENDIX 1

Legislation relating to Domestic Animal Management Plans

Under Section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act), every Council in Victoria is required to produce a Domestic Animal Management Plan (the Plan) which will be renewed every four years.

68A Councils to prepare domestic animal management plans

- (1) Subject to subsection (1A), each Council must, in consultation with the Secretary, prepare a domestic animal management plan on 4 December 2021 and at the end of each period of 4 years after that day.
- (1A) A Council may apply to the Secretary for an extension of time within which to prepare a domestic animal management plan.
- (1B) The Secretary may grant an extension of time under subsection (1A) if the Secretary believes that special circumstances exist that warrant the granting of an extension.
- (2) A domestic animal management plan prepared by a Council must—
 - (a) set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services provided by the Council in its municipal district are adequate to give effect to the requirements of this Act and the regulations; and
 - (b) outline programs for the training of authorised officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of this Act in the Council's municipal district; and
 - (c) outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue in its municipal district—
 - (i) to promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs and cats; and
 - (ii) to ensure that people comply with this Act, the regulations and any related legislation; and
 - (iii) to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals; and
 - (iv) to address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats; and
 - (v) to encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats; and
 - (vi) to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance; and
 - (vii) to effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with this Act and the regulations; and
 - (d) provide for the review of existing orders made under this Act and local laws that relate to the Council's municipal district with a view to determining whether further orders or local laws dealing with the management of dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable; and
 - (e) provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in the Council's municipal district that it thinks necessary; and
 - (f) provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.

- (3) Every Council must—
- (a) review its domestic animal management plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan; and
 - (b) provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan; and
 - (c) publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.



APPENDIX 2

An Overview of Mitchell Shire Council's Responsibilities Under the Domestic Animal's Act 1994

Objectives of the Domestic Animals Act 1994

The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* provides the foundation for the Shire's animal management service.

The purpose of the Act is to promote animal welfare, the responsible ownership of dogs and protection of the environment.

Key features of the Council's responsibilities under the Act include:

- > a scheme to protect the community and the environment from feral and nuisance dogs and cats
- > a registration and identification scheme for dogs and cats which recognises and promotes responsible pet owners.
- > the identification and control of dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs.
- > A registration scheme for domestic animal businesses which promotes the maintenance of standards of those businesses
- > matters relating to the boarding of dogs and cats
- > The regulation of permanent identification of dogs, cats, horses, and other animals
- > Payments to the Treasurer from fees received by Councils under this Act
- > Other related matters.

Codes of Practice

There are six mandatory codes of practices made under the Act which are overseen by Council which relate to the operation of domestic animal businesses.

Domestic Animal Businesses

Domestic animal businesses include breeding and rearing establishments, boarding establishments, shelters and pounds, pet shops, dog training establishments and greyhound establishments.

Mitchell Shire has a Section 26 Order requiring dogs to be leashed on the Broadford Walking Trail, Bushland Park off Goulburn Valley Highway Seymour, and Seymour Walking Track, from Whiteheads Creek end to Seymour/Tooborac end Seymour.

APPENDIX 3

Mitchell Shire Council's Local Laws and Orders relating to Domestic Animal Management

Local Law

Mitchell Shire's Community and Environment Local Law 2021 was introduced in December 2021, replacing the previous Local Law which had been in force since 2013. The new Local Law includes the following requirements of pet owners:

Please note that these are in addition to statewide requirements

PART 4 – ANIMALS

4.1 Keeping animals

4.1.1 An owner or occupier of land must not without a permit keep or allow to be kept any more in number for each kind of animal than as set out in the table below:

Type of animal	Permitted number of animals on residential land and land under 0.4 hectares	Permitted number of animals on rural land and land over 0.4 hectares	Permitted number of animals on farmland
Dogs	2	3	6
Cats	2	3	4

**Please note that the new Local Law has seen an INCREASE in the number of dogs and cats permitted on rural land over 0.4 hectares from 2 to 3 **

4.1.2 Sub-clause 4.1.1 does not apply to:

- dogs and cats under 3 months of age; and
- land that is lawfully used for the purposes of a pet shop, veterinarian business, Council pound, animal breeding or boarding establishment or any other use permitted under the Planning Scheme.

4.2 Animal housing

The owner or occupier of any land on which animals are kept must provide housing, which is adequate and appropriate in the circumstances, taking into consideration:

- the type and number of animals to be kept;

APPENDIX 3

- (b) the capacity to maintain the housing in a sanitary and inoffensive condition; and
- (c) the capacity to protect neighbours from noise from animals on the land.

4.4 Removal of animal excrement

A person in charge of an animal in a municipal place or on a road must:

- (a) carry a suitable device for the collection of excrement from that animal; and
- (b) collect and dispose of the excrement in a manner which does not cause any nuisance or health hazard to any person or detriment to the environment.

4.5 Disposal of animal

A person in charge of a deceased animal must ensure that the animal is disposed of in a timely and humane manner without creating any nuisance, health or environmental hazard.

Orders made under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*

Section 25 of the Act provides Councils with the ability to make an order that would require cats to be securely confined to the owner's premises (including during specified hours).

In October 2019, Mitchell Shire Council introduced a Section 25 Order requiring cats to be securely confined to their owner's premises between sunset and sunrise (the time of sunset and sunrise being those defined by the Bureau of Meteorology)

Section 26 of the Act provides Councils with the ability to make an order that would prohibit or place conditions on the presence of dogs and cats in any public place of the municipal district of the Council.

Mitchell Shire has a Section 26 Order requiring dogs to be leashed on the Broadford Walking Trail, Bushland Park off Goulburn Valley Highway Seymour, and Seymour Walking Track, from Whiteheads Creek end to Seymour/Tooborac end Seymour.

APPENDIX 4

Training Register for Authorised Officers

Authorised Officer Training	Completed	Currently undertaking	Proposed
Industry based			
Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation	3	2	1
Certificate IV in Statutory Compliance (Government)	3	2	1
Diploma in Justice	1	0	0
Bureau of Animal Welfare – training and information days	All	0	As resources allow, all Officers will attend on rotation
Municipal Association of Victoria and Local Government Professionals – training and information days	All	0	
Microchip implantation training	2	0	All Local Laws Officers
Infringements writing	All	0	All Local Laws Officers
Statement taking	All	All	All Local Laws Officers
Evidence gathering	All	All	All Local Laws Officers
Brief preparation	All	All	All Local Laws Officers
Dog and Cat Behaviour Course	1	0	3
Temperament assessment training	4	2	All Local Laws Officers
OH&S training			
Occupational health and safety in the workplace	All	All	All Local Laws Officers
Dealing with aggressive customers	All	All	All Local Laws Officers

APPENDIX 4

Authorised Officer Training	Completed	Currently undertaking	Proposed
OH&S training			
Defensive Driving Course	<i>All</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>All Local Laws Officers</i>
Investigation Upgrade Training	<i>6</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>All Local Laws Officers</i>
First Aid	<i>6</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>All Local Laws Officers</i>
Negotiation, Crisis and Intervention Training	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>All Local Laws Officers</i>
Manage Conflict	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>All Local Laws Officers</i>



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